DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 211 697 CE 030 936

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TITLE Employer Perceptions of Male and Female Applicants for Administrative Positions in Vocational Education.
PUB DATE Dec 81
NOTE 8p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Vocational Association (Atlanta, GA, December 5, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Administrative Policy; *Administrator Attitudes; Administrator Evaluation; *Administrator Qualifications; *Administrator Selection; Educational Administration; *Employer Attitudes; Females; Graduate Study; Higher Education; Males; *Sex Bias; Sex Fairness; *Vocational Education

ABSTRACT

As part of a larger research project at the University of Kentucky, a study was conducted to discover why there are so few women administrators in the upper levels of vocational education administration. The objective of the study was to examine employer perceptions of the qualifications of male and female applicants for administrative positions in vocational education. The study focused on the screening process through indirect assessment. A sample of 114 persons who have responsibility for appointing vocational administrators in Kentucky evaluated average and superior male and female applicants on the basis of two pairs of fictional resumes. They considered seven criteria--educational background, employment experience, career commitment, leadership potential, interpersonal skills, professional involvement, and written recommendations. The study found that sex is an important factor in the evaluation of equally qualified male and female applicants for administrative positions although there were not significant differences in the overall ratings for equally qualified applicants. The findings indicate that the employers in this study see the employment experience of a man as more valuable than the same experience belonging to a woman, and that they perceive women as more competent than men in the area of interpersonal skills. The findings also indicate that women with average qualifications may compete favorably with equally qualified men, but women with superior qualifications may be overlooked. Recommendations were made for treating the issue of sex bias in graduate programs and in inservice education, and for further research on sex bias in employment. (KC)

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Employer Perceptions of Male and Female Applicants for Administrative Positions in Vocational Education

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Home Economics Research Section
American Vocational Association Annual Meeting
December 5, 1981

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It has been well documented:

- that women are under-represented in virtually every area of educational leadership;
- that the higher the level of responsibility, the fewer the women there are in administrative positions;
- that at some administrative levels, women are almost entirely excluded;
- that the overall proportion of women administrators has actually declined in recent years;
- and, that vocational education is no exception to the pattern of male-dominated leadership.

In light of the fact that women constitute a majority in the professional ranks from which administrators are selected, how can we account for so few women at the top? This study was part of a larger research project conducted at the University of Kentucky in an attempt to discover some of the answers to this question as it relates to the imbalance of women administrators in vocational education. The larger study

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investigated the aspirations and attitudes of women in vocational education as well as employer attitudes and employment policies and practices.

The objective of the study was to examine employer perceptions of the qualifications of male and female applicants for administrative positions in vocational education. The study focused on the screening process and was designed to allow an indirect assessment, without revealing to the participants the intent of the study. The sample was composed of 114 individuals who have responsibility for appointing vocational administrators in Kentucky.

The participants evaluated average and superior male and female applicants on the basis of two pairs of fictional resumes, each male/female pair matched for equal qualifications. Each applicant was rated on seven specified criteria, using a Likert-type scale. The criteria were:

- educational background
- employment experience
- career commitment
- leadership potential

- interpersonal skills
- professional involvement
- written recommendations

Data were analyzed by means of a two-way Analysis of Variance for Repeated Measures. Where the presence of an interaction precluded interpretation of the main effects, t-tests were used to test for differences due to sex. Hypotheses were tested at the .05 level of significance. Significant differences in the ratings for equally qualified male and female applicants were used as a basis for the inference of sex bias in the screening process. Post-hoc comparisons were based on five demographic variables.

Findings

Significant interactions between sex of applicant and level of qualificantions were found in the overall rating and on 5 specific criteria:

- employment experience
- professional activities
- written recommendations
- leadership potential
- interpersonal skills

In general, the larger variations were in the ratings for superior

applicants with the higher ratings favoring the male. The exception was on the criterion, interpersonal skills, where the larger variation was found in the ratings for average applicants, with the higher rating for the female.

There were no significant differences in the overall rating for equally qualified male and female applicants. This finding was consistent for both average and superior qualifications and regardless of the respondents' age, length of experience, area of professional preparation, educational level or position title.

The superior male applicant was rated significantly higher than the equally qualified female on the criterion: employment experience.

The average female applicant was rated significantly higher than the equally qualified male on interpersonal skills.

The average female applicant was, in general, evaluated more favorably in comparison with the equally qualified male than was the superior female applicant.

Analysis by demographic variables:

- age
- length of experience in vocational education

- vocational program area
- highest degree held
- position title

revealed a general pattern of preference for male applicants among respondents who:

- were between 40 & 50 years of age,
- had 10 to 20 years experience in vocational education,
- had received professional preparation in vocational education,
- held a Master Degree or less,
- and, were employed at the state level

Respondents who:

- were under age 40,
- had 10 years or less experience in vocational education,
- had received professional preparation in an area outside vocational education,
- held a degree higher than a Masters,
- and were employed at the local or regional level,

tended to evaluate male and female applicants more equitably, or in some instances, showed a preference for the female.

Consistent patterns of n.s. differences favoring the superior male applicant were found in the overall rating and on 5 of the 7 specific criteria - all except interpersonal skills and career commitment.

Consistent patterns of n.s. differences favoring both the average

and superior female applicants were found on the criterion: interpersonal skills.

Implications

Significant interactions between sex of applicant and level of qualifications indicate that sex is an important factor in the evaluation of equally qualified male and female applicants for administrative positions in vocational education. The lack of significant differences in the overall ratings for equally qualified applicants suggests no substantial evidence of sex bias in the overall screening process.

The findings do indicate that the employers in this study see the employment experience of a man as more valuable than the same experience belonging to a woman, and that they perceive women as more competent than men in the area of interpersonal skills. The findings also indicate that women with average qualifications may compete favorably with equally qualified men, but women with superior qualifications may be overlooked.

The administrators who participated in this study have responsibility for hiring and promotion of personnel and for making major policy and program decisions. They are also in key positions to influence the

attitudes and behavior of vocational teachers and students. The elimination of sex bias in vocational education will depend, to a large degree, on the leadership of such individuals.

In light of the fact that a significant proportion of vocational education personnel are found in home economics programs, the findings of this study have relevant implications for home economics as well as for vocational education as a whole:

(1) Teacher education programs, both graduate and undergraduate, and especially programs which prepare administrators, should address issues related to sex bias and sex role stereotyping. Particular emphasis should be given to teaching women how to "sell" their experience and to teaching men interpersonal skills.

(2) In-service programs addressing these issues should be designed for vocational education personnel.

(3) Efforts should be made to identify potential administrators, both women and men, and to encourage them to prepare and apply for administrative positions.

(4) Further research efforts should investigate sex bias which may exist at other steps in the employment process, including recruitment procedures, interviews and in making hiring decisions.